

## Inside

- VDES offers classes on disaster programs - p. 2
- Abandoned lab poses threat - p. 3
- Winter Preparedness Campaign begins - p. 4

## VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

## Northumberland County's recovery committee helps heal community

*Last issue presented ways in which Russell County tailored its recovery committee to meet the unique needs of its citizens. This issue focuses on aspects of the recovery committee concept adapted by Northumberland County.*

**T**he tornado spawned by Hurricane Bertha last July destroyed five mobile homes and damaged several more in one of the county's small, closely-knit communities. Because the disaster was not federally declared, local government was challenged to find funds to meet the needs of the 32 affected families.

"We knew we needed to set up some type of local committee to deal with donations and coordinate state and local efforts during recovery," said John Burton, county administrator and emergency services coordinator. A committee was formed made up of representatives from the local area agency on aging, two local churches, the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, a local emergency food and shelter program, Social Services, the Kiwanis, a civic organization and the Board of Supervisors.

"With regard to Madison County, we were interested in how they set up their fund management system," said Burton. "We set up our account at one bank to make handling of funds easier and authorized three people to sign the checks — the county treasurer, the committee coordinator and the social services director. We decided the whole committee would vote on use of the funds."

Similar to Madison County's efforts, the committee designed a simple survey which asked applicants to name the property owner, describe damage to their

homes and estimate the cost of repairs.

The county is hoping to either repair or replace damaged or destroyed homes through a program managed by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development. Through that



agency's Indoor Plumbing Rehabilitation Program, grants are dispensed by local area agencies on aging to families that meet program eligibility requirements. Committee funds will supplement grant amounts if necessary or provide assistance to those not eligible for the program.

"Our biggest difficulties have been legal problems associated with ownership of property," said Burton. To be eligible for a grant under the program, the house and land must be owned by the applicant. The committee discovered that many of the families owned homes located on land owned by someone else or families had inherited estates that had never been settled.

To establish property ownership and assist applicants in meeting program eligibility requirements, the committee has been working with an organization within the Virginia State Bar Association called "Young Lawyers Section," that volunteers legal assistance to needy citizens. A local law firm has also provided free legal assistance.

Burton offered this advice to other emergency managers: "Anyone who's

been through a disaster has had valuable experience. The knowledge we gained from talking to Madison County was of benefit to us. Each disaster is unique and you must tailor the ideas to your own situation."

He observed, "There's really not a whole lot of direct assistance from the state and none from the federal government (if the disaster is not federally declared) except to adapt existing state programs to meet the needs of the locality."

### Get the complete weather picture

The most complete and up-to-date weather information from the National Weather Service (NWS), via The Weather Channel, may not be available in your area. If your local cable operator does not have updated Star/Weather Channel software, you won't get NWS's Short Term Forecasts (STF) during local updates.

"The STF has become the primary method of communicating expected short-term weather and appropriate hydrological conditions to the public and other customers," said NWS Meteorologist Bill Sammler. "This is critical for assessing near-term weather conditions ranging out to six hours." He urged emergency managers to contact their local cable representatives about acquiring the software.

For more information, call Bill Sammler at 757/899-5732.

# Classes explain disaster recovery programs

**D**isasters cost money. Roads must be fixed, homes repaired, businesses rebuilt and schools reopened. The personal healing takes time, but the task of physically repairing your community can begin immediately.

You're already aware of the federal and state programs available to help you meet these costs. The challenge is

knowing how to use them effectively. The Finance and Grants Management Division at VDES has developed training designed to help you understand the nuts and bolts of these programs.

The classes will explain the different programs, define your locality's rights and responsibilities regarding them and offer guidelines for setting up a

system that identifies and tracks damage and accounts for repair or replacement costs.

This system will prove its worth when you need to prepare the necessary documentation required by the state and FEMA. The class explains this process and demonstrates how to submit damage claims so that your jurisdiction can receive the appropriate

amount of funding.

Classes will be tailored to fit your locality's needs and can be held in your community, but you and your staff will develop the solutions that work for you.

Call Bob Andersen at 804/674-2463 for more information.

## FEMA program assists needy citizens

**F**eeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, providing meals to the elderly — while the bulk of FEMA's budget money is used in disaster response, recovery and mitigation efforts, one small part of it goes to a little-known program called the Emergency Food and Shelter (EFS) National Board Program. Out of the \$100 million allocated to the program this fiscal year, Virginia is receiving \$1,561,958.

EFS is not a disaster assistance program, but is designed to provide supplemental funding to communities with demonstrable non-disaster related needs. The program is based on a highly successful partnership between FEMA and other volunteer, nonprofit organizations. A national board composed of these volunteer groups and chaired by FEMA yearly assesses community needs across the nation. The amount of money distributed through this program to local boards is based on the community's

unemployment and poverty statistics.

Local boards, whose memberships are similar to the national board, determine high priority needs within the community and distribute funds to the organization that can best provide for those needs. The National

Board writes checks to the providers selected by the local boards.

If a jurisdiction feels that it needs more money than the amount rewarded or did not qualify under the National Board's review process, it may

be able to receive money from the state set-aside program, which has greater flexibility in its criteria when selecting jurisdictions for funding.

For more information on this program, visit the United Way home page at <http://www.efsp.unitedway.org>, call FEMA representative Carole Eiben at 202/646-4610 or the Virginia State Set Aside Committee chairperson, Barbara Terry, at 540/373-0041.



## Local task forces take off

Spun from the destructive wrath of Hurricane Fran, the formation of the State Disaster Recovery Task Force and its local and regional committees is in full swing.

At this point, Task Force Coordinator Selby Jacobs has visited with 17 jurisdictions to assist them with setting up their local committees.

He explained, "When we have completed this process, the task force committees on the local, regional and state level will be structured to provide assistance to local government and businesses, as well as individuals."

"The intent is to make this a community-driven effort that will build resources at the local level. We want to put in place local structures that will be able to respond in case of a catastrophic event," Jacobs noted.

In mid-October, Jacobs assisted Rockingham County with forming its local committee which is working to repair the damage inflicted by Hurricane Fran. "In terms of a recovery committee, we've never had anything of this magnitude," said Robbie Symons, emergency services

deputy coordinator.

Symons noted because the committee brought together organizations from around the county, the groups were able to share resources. In one instance, two church groups exchanged clothing and bedding that each needed for the members of their communities. "These two groups probably wouldn't have talked to each other in the past, because they would have been working on their own," said Symons.

Don Driver, Rockingham County's director of social services, commented, "We've moved over the years from thinking that federal and state government will provide the answers, to local communities helping their own people. This is the level from which we ought to coordinate services."

Through these committees, "Emergency services managers can get insight into what is available from the state," said Symons.

For more information, call Selby Jacobs at 804/213-3320.

# HAZ MAT



## Abandoned building poses hazmat threat

**T**his past October in Richmond, a hazardous materials incident occurred in a small neighborhood that exemplified the regulatory, as well as the physical hazards responders face.

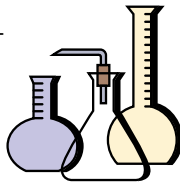
When police answered a call that an abandoned building had been vandalized, they discovered a warehouse of unidentified hazardous materials. The city's fire department was called out and notified DEQ which sent a representative to the site.

Subsequent investigation revealed containers of chemicals such as nitric acid and hydrochloric acid, tables littered with open beakers and bottles, bags of asbestos and vials of blood. The building housed the Applied Science Laboratories, a business that performed routine lab services up until the death of the owner about 18 months ago.

DEQ called in the Environmental Protection Agency which deemed the site an emergency. The federal agency is cleaning up the site at a cost of about \$200,000.

What does this incident illustrate? In Virginia, no single state agency oversees and certifies lab operations. For example, the Department of Labor and Industry regulates practices related to worker safety, the Department of Public Health monitors labs

that test blood and body parts and DEQ has some regulatory authority over labs that test for pollutants. In a situation like this, determining which agency has regulatory authority and the power to enforce it is extremely difficult.



Localities, on the other hand, can use fire prevention codes, building codes and business licensing to help prevent this situation from occurring in their communities.

"This lab was vacant for 18 months," said VDES Hazardous Materials Officer Greg Britt. "Kids could have come in and gotten contaminated or hurt, which would have created much larger problems."

He noted, "Because the initial response to an emergency comes from local government, local emergency services people need to know what these fixed facilities contain. This type of situation presents a threat to both responders and private citizens."

He described other actions localities can take to help prevent, prepare for and respond to this type of hazardous materials situation. They include identifying hazardous materials threats in the community, determining vulnerability and risk, ensuring  
(continued at top of next column)

pre-incident planning has been completed, familiarization with the federal, state and local regulations that may apply to potential hazardous materials situations in the community and, finally, having contingency plans in place for effective response.

"Ideally, every business like this should have a biannual inspection, which would catch some of these problems," said Britt. "Again, it comes back to localities inspecting these types of businesses. They're the guys who are going to have to go in and 'fight the fire.'"

## Insurance industry scales back coverage

In what is becoming an increasingly disturbing trend, Nationwide is joining other major property insurers and scaling back its sales of new policies in the coastal counties of 16 states, including Virginia. According to a recent article in *Emergency Preparedness News*, the company cited the vulnerability of coastal areas to windstorms and hurricanes as one of the reasons for the decision.

The recent trend of storms along the Atlantic coast have fed fears that one catastrophic storm could bankrupt the entire industry, said the article. In the third quarter of this year, the

industry suffered its highest losses since 1992 and Hurricane Andrew. Over \$2.23 billion in disaster-related losses were paid out, with Hurricane Fran accounting for more than \$1.6 billion and Bertha \$135 million.

The article described a proposal by Florida's Insurance Commissioner to establish a regional catastrophe fund which would be financed by the industry, spread hurricane risk over many states and hopefully keep insurance both available and affordable. For information, call Shelley Pelham or Don Pride at 904/413-2842.

## Publication costs soar for Red Cross

**C**osts are soaring on the publication front and the American Red Cross is feeling the pinch. During the fiscal year that ended in June, the organization spent \$6.7 million reproducing their publications. To cut costs, the national organization is now charging local Red Cross chapters for material ordered from the national warehouse.

The Red Cross has advised local chapters to inform their customers that they will be charged for bulk orders, with prices based on printing costs. At this time, VDES will not be ordering materials from the Red Cross, but will continue to order publications and videos from FEMA and NOAA, although selection and quantity may be limited.

With Hurricane Fran fresh in the minds of the public, now is the time to strengthen ties with business and industry in your community and share the costs. Call your local Red Cross chapter for more information on this new policy.

## TRAINING



### Basic Public Information/Media Relations Workshop

January 9, 1997  
Culpeper

### Public Policy in Emergency Management

January 29, 1997  
Richmond

### Emergency Preparedness Community Outreach

February 7, 1997  
Newport News  
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/674-2458

### Technological Hazards Division

### Hazardous Materials Incident Management

February 7-9, 1997  
Location to be announced  
For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/674-2510

### Search and Rescue

### GSAR Institute, Parts I and II

January 17-19, 1997  
February 14-16, 1997  
Camp VA Jaycee

### Managing Search Operations

February 7-9, 1997  
February 22-23, 1997  
Charlottesville  
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

### Workshops

### CAMEO Training Workshop

January 6-8  
Richlands  
For information, call 804/674-2708

# VDES launches Winter Preparedness Campaign

**T**he relentless snowfall shut down schools, businesses and paralyzed day-to-day activities in communities across the state. On the heels of this freezing weather, deceptively balmy temperatures melted the piled-up snow, causing disastrous flooding in many localities.

But winter hadn't pulled every trick from its bag yet.

Within weeks, plunging temperatures and ice storms socked citizens with yet more winter woes.

Tragically, eighteen people died from weather-related

incidents in January. Before winter mayhem swoops in this year, prepare your citizens.

Start now and use the Winter Preparedness Campaign that runs from December 1-7 as the

vehicle to drive the message home to your public. Ski the Internet and download the Winter Preparedness Campaign material from the VDES homepage at

<http://www.state.va.us/~des/des.htm> or call the VDES Public Information Office at 804/674-2499 and stock up on your campaign material now.



## Free publications available

**F**ree brochures and posters on hurricane preparedness, tornados and other topics are available from the State Farm Insurance Company.

As Virginia slips into winter and temperatures drop, the potential for water pipes to freeze and burst becomes a real threat for many homeowners. State Farm has plenty of material that explains how to prevent this particular catastrophe.

Publications are available in bulk quantities. Call Mary Beth Cramer at 804/972-5139 to order.



### Terrorism Update

December 19  
2:00-4:00 p.m.

This update on the August 15 EENET broadcast focuses on recent legislative action, lessons learned during the Olympics and other topics. You'll have a chance to call in and question people involved in anti-terrorist initiatives during the roundtable discussion in the second half. Call 301/447-1068 for satellite coordinates and for more information.

**The Insurance Institute for Property Loss Reduction is looking for outstanding examples of community mitigation programs undertaken in 1996. The best ones will receive the organization's Community Spotlight Award.**

**The deadline for entries is March 14, 1997. For an application, call 617/722-0200 or email [iipr@aol.com](mailto:iipr@aol.com)**



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UPDATE is a monthly publication of the Virginia Department of Emergency Services. Contributions of articles or ideas are welcome and can be made by calling 804/674-2499. State Coordinator...Addison E. Slayton Information Director...Michael J. La Civita Executive Editor...Janet L. Clements Managing Editor...Jo A. Hoots

Access the VDES homepage at:  
<http://www.state.va.us/~des/des.htm>

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